

City of Alexandria
Department of Planning and Zoning
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Landmark/Van Dorn Area Plan
Lecture Pad Meeting Notes May 3, 2008

The notes below were recorded on lecture pad sheets during workshop sessions with three breakout groups. At the end of the morning workshop, attendees were given five green stickers to place on the morning session statements from all groups indicating statements they agreed with and considered most important. Green dots here show where those stickers were placed.

Brackets [] indicate additions made by planning staff and group facilitators after the meeting for clarification of the group's discussion.

BG – comments by Bob Gibbs, retail consultant.

Breakout Group 1
Morning Session

1

Transit

- Make metro station walkable – it's ugly & not accessible.
- Cameron Station also wants to walk to Metro.
- It's unsafe
- There [are] no bike or pedestrian trails.
- No [direct] connection[s to Metro]
4 miles from Cameron Station to Metro using bike trail

2

- Preferred off-street bike trails
- [Addition of] VRE station stop possibility → VRE buying land → would give better access to downtown.
- More & more North Van Dorn being used [by Fairfax County residents] →
- No timing on any traffic lights on Van Dorn. You go through too many lights [which do not have their timing synchronized].

3

- DASH service not as frequent & convenient
- North traffic in morning overwhelming from regional traffic
- Fairfax Connector buses & DASH buses to coordinate together → to have [a master schedule] available to you.
- Internal shuttles to connect to transit hubs.

4

- Existing → 20 private shuttles but don't coordinate [with each other or other transit systems].
- Concern about details of implementation of transit connection between Landmark and Metro station.
- Link areas [Mall to Metro]
- Concern of how much work done with Fairfax to alleviate how many people come in → Kingstowne traffic
- Need of parking garage at Metro station

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5

- [Great view] At Courtney and Van Dorn → @ hill to see how bad things [have developed]
- Encourage people to walk & bike
- Any incentive to re-route people from Van Dorn.
- ○ Re-programmed roadways
- Narrow St → historically it [Van Dorn Street] was two lanes

Housing

- City putting Affordable Housing @ West End

6

- One of things happening Housing → pockets of high end housing surrounded by affordable housing (subsidized vs. affordable)

- ○ Workforce Affordable housing & rentals desired.

↓
Concerned about how City defines it.

- Concerned about creating “projects” model.

7

- Workforce housing → 70 – 100% of median income.
- ○ Mix uses → hotels, office, walkable, movie theater.
- Highway side view now advertising garage → put retail (concentrate) on highway side.
- Van Dorn Plaza → potential for double L shape model.
- You cannot see the stores @ shopping center.

8

- Lack of visibility of small stores
- Gym is a success!
- ○ Preference of Mid-Rise for housing (townhouses, etc.)
- Concern of being able to do everything with 4-5 story density.
- ○ Provision to allow different height (high-rise) → why not have high-rises?

Open Space

- Stevenson Park not maintained by City.

9

- ○ Potential for pocket parks
- ○ → Preserve and enhance [now unused] green space available right now.
- ○ River [Backlick Run/Cameron Run] not being taken advantage of [could be] landscape icon, landmark.
- Connect to bike path going to Eisenhower.

Environ.

- Place emphasis on green buildings
- Should not be any auto-repair type services! There are places on Eisenhower and Duke.

10

- Maybe you can have them, without them being obvious.

Character

- ○ It needs to be “Gateway” for city of Alexandria.
- Colonial theme of Old Town liked [but don’t replicate].
- Concern about destiny of small businesses across mall (south lot)
- Re-developing the big boxes.
- What are the plans for the “Nodes” → right now one surrounded by gas station on corners.

11

- Disconnect [between] 2 shopping centers [Safeway and Giant]

Implementation

- Should be done in conjunction with Fairfax (Lack of communication between Alexandria and Fairfax).
- ○ Tysons model of breaking the mall and putting high rises – good!
- ○ Metro stop one of the lowest used
- ○ Is it worth it to try to plan for increased ridership?

Breakout Group 2
Morning Session

1

- Issue of Metro Location (not central)
 - Create connections/access
 - Connect to Mall (difficult)
 - Distance as main issue
 - Options?
- Create “Places” along Metro – Mall connection
- [Pedestrian] safety [from crime, traffic] very important
- Don't focus only on V.D. Metro
 - Consider alternatives
- Convenience of parking
- Provide mixed retail

2

- Enhance walkability.
 - Convenience & alternatives
- Enhance quality of streets/sidewalks.
- Balance between pedestrian-friendly & vehicular-friendly streets.
- Include bike paths.
 - Current issues/barriers
 - Good dedicated lanes
 - Multiuse trails
- Traffic light distance as issue.

3

- Provide mixed uses & sizes
 - Focus on neighborhood needs
 - Human scale-oriented.
- Issue of current single-use areas
- Consider new uses & redevelopments (Even for outdated residential)
- Include (possibly) some of uses currently outside project boundaries.

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- Aim at walkable neighborhood(s).
- Aim at providing mixed-use & retail alternatives.
- Lack of cultural/art resources (Especially in West End)
- Mall as possible source for cultural/art opportunities.
- Mall as both local and regional draw.
 - Attract regional draw, but preserving neighborhood
 - Mall = regional vs. neighborhood = local.
 - Two distinct characters

5

- A "16-hour" alive neighborhood [incorporating office for daytime activity as well as retail and residential for evening activity].
 - (Still active & vibrant after 5 P.M.)
 - Flexible zoning, allowing different uses over time.
- / ----- /
- Provide & enhance green space.
 - Current lack of quality green space
 - Worries about higher density
 - Provide regional green connections.
 - Safety [from crime, traffic] very important

6

- Minimize surface parking
- Creative [solutions for] parking
- Hide structural parking
- Reasonable green approach
 - Do not go overboard [emphasize lasting and tested green technologies]
 - "Green roads" + roofs.
 - Use different green techniques
 - Enhance water quality
- Preserve wildlife & its habitat
 - Restore & enhance wetlands

7

- Financially viable for all stakeholders [for the long-term economic health of the City. Redevelopment should not be a financial drain on the City]
- Mixed-uses
- 50% mix of commercial & residential
- Need for gathering places/recreational/cultural opps.

Breakout Group 3
Morning Session

1

- Fewer Cars
- ○ Traffic calming on Van Dorn
- Specific about how much will change?
- Bike paths
- Pedestrian paths
- Bike paths don't all connect
- Holmes Run connects to Old Town, but not in the other direction.
- Ride a bike to "somewhere"
- Connection to Metro

2

- ○ Walkable → Important
- ○ Tighten the street grid
- Dangerous to walk
- "DASH" is infrequent – need shorter headways.
- Transit should serve more than Metro.
- Connecting Landmark Mall to I-395-express lane???
- Landmark as a transportation hub – who pays?

3

- ○ Wider sidewalks - Outdoor seating (along Van Dorn) - slows down traffic.
- A concrete plan
- Increase "Multi-Modal" lanes.
- Pedestrian links should work.
- Challenges - multiple owners
- coordinating the engineering efforts
- Development near Metro.
- ○ Convenient access to Van Dorn Metro.

4

- ○ "Leverage the Metro"
- Add Metro to the Planning Area
- ○ Open space – small parks that are useable – dog parks?
- ○ Parks with Art integrated
- Parks with "Attitude"
- Play Areas
- Ensure
- Mixed income housing & office space.

5

- ○ Protecting & preserving existing affordable housing (keep it affordable)
- Rental housing is important.
- Open space as an "outlet" (like having Central Park as an amenity).
- Open spaces that foster interaction.
- An "Architectural" standard.
- Landmark was "Artillery Hill"
- Enhance Area's History.
- ○ International community.
- Bring buildings to the street edge.

6

OPEN SPACE

- ○ Seasonal uses for open spaces – fountain, ice rink, farmer's market.
- Programmed open spaces.
- Create an entity that can do -
 - Programming open space
 - Transportation management
- Identify open spaces in the Master Plan.
- Public Art.
- ○ Spaces for smaller children, teens.
- Reston Town Center as a good precedent for various open spaces.

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- Integrate open spaces with adjacent uses.
- Encourage evening uses; i.e. Shirlington.
- Identify champions for theaters.
- A recreation center as an amenity.

8

ENVIRONMENT

- Buildings with green roofs ● ●
- Promote Leed standards.
- Don't build "Thermal Hot Spots"
- Minimize impacts of new development on "heat gain"

● ● ● Reduce amount of asphalt.

- Storm water – improve run-off quality by treatment at source. Rain gardens, green roofs.
- Use TIFs to address regional environment.

9

- New construction must build green.
- Columbia → A model for a new City
- LEED → Exceeding LEED is now possible.
- Must have clear goals for environment.
- Make big moves early on.
- City encourages green building.
- Engage an environmental group now to help write goals to leverage this opportunity.
- Limit automobile trips and
- encourage walkability.

10

- ○ Important to break down blocks
- Include Metro Station area and industrial lots between planning area and Metro.
- Layout recommendations for connecting to the Metro.

11

- Implementation – Fiscal
- ○ Office Space } High returns to the City
- ○ Retail } Help to finance TIF
- ○ Hotel }
- Residential has lower returns to the City
- "Maximize" return to the City
- Woodlands in Texas → Public - private Funding precedent that works
- TIF
- Metro Station - including this will help TIFs
- An important office tenant near the highway.

12

- BJ's has 2.0 FAR
- North of Landmark should be for office (visibility grade)
- Carlyle has 2.5 FAR and below grade parking
- Connectivity is key to developing Landmark.

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Breakout Group 1
Afternoon Session

1

- How do you develop a grid system that's not there right now?
- What are the obvious streets that you have to create a grid?
- As properties develop → opportunities to introduce new streets/connections → where are the likely areas to develop?

2

- Edsall – Eisenhower connection?
- Have to include Eisenhower & Metro when thinking of Van Dorn plan
- Include Landmark Watergate neighborhood in the boundary?
- Dedicated lanes for transit, should it be on median or curbside?

3

- Nodes [at the major cross streets] along Van Dorn can be the transit stops.
- What [type] of transit will be brought?
- Do T-intersection in place of the loop [ramps at Duke Street and Van Dorn Street].

Breakout Group 2
Afternoon Session

1

- Which areas are undevelopable?
[Including areas that will not redevelop soon, e.g. apartments along Reynolds.]
- Which areas are developable?
 - Red = main arteries
 - Blue = secondary mall connection
- Create multiple connections into Mall site.
- Connection from Metro over Van Dorn is difficult.
- Old Town grid is too [rigid] for West End.
[More variation in block size appropriate here.]
- Create road networks so that local residents don't have to get on Duke or Van Dorn.

2

- Extend Whiting past Edsall to Pickett
- High rise east of Van Dorn is a constraint.
- Connection from Van Dorn to Whiting – connect that same road up to Stevenson
- Connect Pickett to Whiting extension (new connections shown in blue)

3

- Focus on amenities for people that live in the neighborhood.
- Concentrate density along Van Dorn corridor (mixed-use) (purple represents mixed use with density) [including residential, retail, personal service and/or office uses]
- Developer pays for street improvements interior to project.
- Character of Van Dorn? ["Boulevard" with lots of green, but can also carry traffic.]
- Arts & cultural draw would be at the mall.

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4

- Integrate arts/cultural element into the entire area. More than one arts area is desirable; smaller art areas (like Old Town). [Places for local cultural venues – smaller performance theater perhaps in an area other than the mall]
- Create public parking to support new amenities.
- Anchor retail located at new intersection on Van Dorn.
- Affordable housing opportunities mixed into Landmark/Van Dorn area.

5

- Pedestrian connection along Van Dorn to the Metro
- Ramp down east side of Van Dorn Bridge to Metro so you can get down from bridge.

Breakout Group 3
Afternoon Session

1

Things to Save

Duke St. and Van Dorn

Can break up Safeway block with streets.

Connect through to BJ's

Multi-use paths – Segways and strollers.

If McGuire and Greenberg can be combined, can get a grid.

Put down the vision, people may do it.

350 feet old town grid.

2

Can create a street behind Van Dorn –
Access parking there – shared parking in center.

Centers along Van Dorn – major intersections.

Terrain as a break between places.

Van Dorn at Pickett – may not be the right center – too busy with traffic.

Place at intersection, or not?

Limited stops on way to Metro from Mall – those places.

3

Uses

At road frontage = retail

Views from over Duke St. – visibility to 395.
Retail and office.

Residential – views to D.C.
People who like to live up and have a view.

People are nervous about density.

Apartments – paths/blocks drawn at breaks in structures.

Owner might want to fill in additional.

Pickett not the “place” – strip mall across.

Stevenson may work.

4

Pickett a good spot because adjacent to
Backlick Run – Green Corridor.

Heavy retail – can support a lot of retail. Need
some big anchor stores here. Go to
Kingstowne, Springfield for anchor stores.

Fancy-schmantzy Landmark in the back of our
minds looking at the rest.

Hotel – potential on Walker-Stevenson –
Whiting block.

Concerned – really want good retail – are we
going overboard.

[BG.] If you push it, could get 25% more
[neighborhood retail outside the mall].

Stop leakage, less traffic, better quality of life.

5

Connection to Metro at park

Don't need traditional mall to get Nordstroms.

Richmond – 2 new open-air malls – Saks and
Nordstrom anchors.

Open Space

Islands in road – slow people down

Transit in median.

Green breaks along Van Dorn.

Green gateway – Pickett @ Van Dorn

Land owners will capitalize on that
opportunity.

Gateway – Duke

Gateway – Stevenson?